

10 March 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR BOARD AND STAFF

SUBJECT: Reform of the NIE

REFERENCE: The enclosure to Abbot's Memo dated 9 March 1970

1. The Reference is, incidentally, an interesting demonstration that it takes about 19 years to complete a full circle. On 9 January 1970 the Secretary of State, a newcomer to the consideration of NIEs, arrived approximately at the point where we were in late 1950.

2. In late 1950 there was a revolutionary reform and the NIE was invented. Among other features that distinguished the NIE from the compendious works of ORE was the doctrine that it should be addressed exclusively to the concerns of the President, the National Security Council, and their immediate advisers. Anything below this level of consideration was deemed departmental, not national, intelligence.

3. Fine and dandy -- but some people thought that the conclusions presented to the President should be supported by something more substantial than mere assertion by the DCI with the advice and concurrence of the IAC (USIB). So NIEs came to have Appendices containing the (estimated to be) factual data on which the conclusions in the NIE were based.

4. The IAC (USIB) balked at being called upon to approve (accept responsibility for) all those grubby details in the Appendices. That stuff was beneath the consideration of the USIB, not to mention the NSC. There was a Great Debate as to whether the Appendices should be omitted altogether, or whether they might be merely noted by USIB. In the end, however, the USIB reluctantly consented to approve the Appendices as an integral part of the NIE. Of course it did not take long after that for the Appendices to become the body of the NIE, preceeded by Conclusions and followed by Annexes.

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5. This tendency for NIEs to become more and more voluminous and detailed has been aggravated as departmental systems analysts and planners came to refuse to accept departmental intelligence (in the original concept) as credible unless it had been certified by inclusion in an NIE (or rather a NIPP), so that departmental intelligence representatives themselves came to press for the inclusion of more and more operational detail in NIEs. The result, finally noticed with respect to recent NIEs, is that Presidential-level estimates have become hard to find in the haystack of the detailed, departmental-level intelligence now included in NIEs.

6. It must be acknowledged, of course, that this original conception of a distinction between national (i.e., Presidential-NSC level) and departmental (i.e., operational) intelligence is impossible to sustain when the President and the Secretary of Defense involve themselves personally in such issues as the "foot-print" of an MRV.

7. That development renders this historical note highly academic. It may be of passing interest, however, to observe that the Secretary of State is much closer to the original conception of an NIE than are the NIEs on which he comments.

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